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INVESTING IN PEOPLE

(Health)

RP triples budget to fight TB

By Kristine L. Alave

(Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer News Online – 3/28/08)

MANILA, Philippines -- The Philippine government has almost tripled its budget to combat tuberculosis and it is strengthening its focus on advocacy and in ensuring that all patients get the necessary medicines to beat the disease, one of the top causes of death in the country.

In a press briefing in Marikina City on Friday to mark World TB Day, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said the government has increased its TB budget to P680 million this year from P240 million in 2006.

"This unparalleled amount of investments for TB control will be used to intensify action and make swifter strides in our fight against tuberculosis," Duque said.

He noted that a big chunk of the allocation will be used to purchase TB medicines and laboratory supplies that will be used in diagnostic centers and in Directly Observed Treatment-Short course (DOTS) centers nationwide. About 30 percent of the budget will go to monitoring, capacity-building programs, and advocacy campaigns.

"With effective basic DOTS services, we can halt further spread and prevent the emergence of multiple and extensively drug-resistant forms of TB," Duque said.

"We will further strengthen the health system toward effective TB management and engage local governments and more private partners to meet the increasing demands of basic and multi-drug resistant cases. At the same time, we will strive

to sustain quality DOTS implementation and increase coverage for the TB outpatient package through PhilHealth," he added.

The government has intensified its anti-TB campaign in the face of the growing number of TB patients in the Philippines.

According to the health department data, there are 131 new TB cases for every 100,000 population in the Philippines. It is also the 6th cause of illness and death in the country.

According to a USAID 2000 study, the Philippines loses around P26.4 billion income due to premature deaths from TB.

Data from health studies and officials show that 75 Filipinos die from TB every day and that the Philippines, at 7,000 cases, has the second highest number of multi-drug resistant patients in the Western Pacific, after China.

Dr. Thelma Tupasi, of the Tropical Diseases Foundation Inc., said the number of drug-resistant TB patients will rise to 14,000 in 2014.

"The alarm has been raised by the World Health Organization and this trend threatens to derail our hard-won progress in TB control. This is one of the challenges that we are up against despite the 75 percent detection rate among our TB cases and 90 percent treatment rate," Duque said.

This year, Duque said 117 drug-resistant TB patients will get free drugs worth P150,000 from the health department and foreign donors.

Health officials said it was important for the public to know that TB is curable.

They noted that many patients refuse to consult a doctor because of the stigma attached to the disease.

Tupasi said anyone can be stricken with TB. "But it's not true that it can never be cured. When I was a student, I had TB. But look at me, I'm still alive," she said.